

Modernist Communities of Desire: The Villa Seurat Circle

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From 1930 until the outbreak of World War II, a select group of artists and authors circled around the Villa Seurat in Paris. At the core of this group were Anais Nin, Henry Miller, and Lawrence Durrell, three authors known for the erotic element of their *oeuvres*; moreover, as Ian MacNiven recently argued, “the Villa Seurat nexus was of inestimable importance to them all.” While the artistic network was to mark them and left an impression on others as diverse as Hans Reichel, Alfred Pèrles, Betty Ryan, George Orwell, and Dylan Thomas, this group also constitutes a queer constellation of authors otherwise not seen as such. Durrell, and especially Miller, have been repeatedly portrayed as the epitome of masculine heterosexuality, and Nin’s works are rarely considered in studies of lesbian authorship of the period. I contend something different—despite very marked oversights and scholarly arguments specifically in support of heteronormative readings, all three core authors explicitly endorse and implicate themselves in discourses of queerness. My paper, therefore, addresses these elements in all three’s works as a topic for comparative analysis, and then proceeds to question what investments in general literary criticism, as well as Gay and Lesbian Studies, may have led to their exclusion and frequent misrepresentation with regard to the role of desire in their fiction and autobiography.